

DISCUSSION AS A WAY OF TEACHING
Stephen Brookfield (University of St. Thomas)

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WORKSHOP RESOURCE PACKET

Please note that we will NOT go through this packet sequentially, nor will we refer to all the items below. They are there simply for reference purposes.

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Mailing address: MOH 217, School of Education, University of St. Thomas, 1000 LaSalle Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55403-
E-Mail: sdbrookfield@stthomas.edu
Home Page: www.geocities.com/stephenbrookfield

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WHY DISCUSSIONS FAIL

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

UNPREPARED STUDENTS

NO GROUND RULES

REWARD SYSTEMS ASKEW

NO TEACHER MODELING

Discussion Ground Rules

One of my assumptions that has been consistently called into question by my experiences is my belief that adults know how to talk to each other in ways that are respectful, inclusive and democratic. It shouldn't really surprise me that this belief is flawed. Given that we live in a culture infused with the dynamics of power, and that we rarely (if ever) have the chance to participate in or witness egalitarian group talk, most people don't know how this happens or what it looks like. Even after using group discussion as a teaching method for over a quarter of a century I am still astonished by the ease with which capable, well intentioned, generous people can fall into domineering patterns of communication that reproduce inequities found in the outside society. If the power relationships in the outside society are allowed to shape early on what happens in a discussion group, then the process may as well be shut down because little of value will happen. So it is important to spend some time evolving ground rules to frame how democratic talk might happen. In setting up these expectations I like to use critical incidents in learners' own autobiographies as discussants as the starting point. The instructions on how to do this are reproduced below:

Creating Ground Rules for Discussion: A Critical Incident Approach

As a first step in setting up this discussion group I suggest that we spend some time trying to create ground rules for our participation. To help us do this I would like each of you to do the following:

- 1. Think of the best group discussions you've ever been involved in. What things happened that made these conversations so satisfying? Make a few notes on this by yourself.*
- 2. Think of the worst group discussions you've ever been involved in. What things happened that made these conversations so unsatisfactory? Make a few notes on this by yourself.*
- 3. Take turns in talking about what made discussion groups work so well for you. Listen for common themes shared experiences and features of conversation that a majority of you identify as ones you'd like to see present in this group.*
- 4. Take turns in talking about what made discussion groups work so badly for you. Listen for common themes shared experiences and features of group conversation that a majority of you identify as ones you'd like to see avoided in this critical reflection group.*

5. *For each of the characteristics of good discussion you agree on, try and suggest three things a group could do to ensure, as much as possible, that these characteristics were present. Be as specific and concrete as you can. For example, if you feel that good conversation is cumulative and connected, with later themes building on and referring back to earlier ones, you could propose a rule whereby every new comment made by a participant is prefaced with an explanation as to how it relates to, or springs from, an earlier comment.*

6. *For each of the characteristics of bad discussion you agree on, try and suggest three things a group could do to ensure, as much as possible, that these characteristics were avoided. Be as specific and concrete as you can. For example, if you feel that bad conversation happens when one person's voice dominates you could propose a rule whereby no-one is allowed to follow a comment they have made with another comment until at least three other people have spoken (unless another group member explicitly invites the participant to say something else).*

7. *Try and finish this exercise by drafting a charter for discussion that comprises the specific ground rules that you agree on. If less than a two-thirds majority support a particular rule I suggest that you agree to re-examine this rule after no more than four meetings of the group. At that time, the group may decide to drop or affirm the rule, or draft an additional one.*

The Circle of Voices

Participants form into a circle of about 5. They are allowed up to three minutes silent time to organize their thoughts. During this time they think about what they want to say on the topic once the circle of voices begins. After this silent period the discussion opens with each person having a period of uninterrupted air time. During the time each person is speaking no one else is allowed to interrupt.

People can take their turns to speak by going round the circle in order or volunteering at random. Although the latter arrangement sounds the most relaxed and informal the opposite is often the case. The order of the circle removes from participants the stress of having to decide whether or not they will try and jump in after another student has finished speaking. Not having to decide this is one less thing to worry about. An important benefit of using the circle of voices at the start of a discussion is that it prevents the development early on of a pecking order of contributors. Introverted, shy members, those whose experience has taught them to mistrust academe, or those who view discussion as another thinly veiled opportunity for teachers to oppress or offend, will often stay silent at the beginning of a course. The longer this silence endures, the harder it is for these individuals to speak out. By way of contrast, in the circle of voices everyone's voice is heard at least once at the start of the session.

After the circle of voices has been completed, and everyone has had the chance to say their piece, then the discussion opens out into a more free flowing format. As this happens a second ground rule comes into effect. Participants are only allowed to talk about another person's ideas that have already been shared in the circle of voices. A person cannot jump into the conversation by expanding on his own ideas, he can only talk about his reactions to what someone else has said. The only exception to this ground rule is if someone else asks him directly to expand on his ideas. This simple ground rule prevents the tendency toward 'grandstanding' that sometimes afflicts a few articulate, confident individuals.

To recap the ground rules:-

Begin by going round the circle with each person contributing & no interruptions allowed

After this, move into open discussion, but remember your contributions can only be about, or refer back to, something one of the other group members said in the opening circle.

CONVERSATIONAL MOVES

Paste the conversational moves listed below on 3x5 cards and randomly distribute them among participants before a pre-arranged discussion session. Ask participants to practice their move during the discussion that follows. When the discussion is over distribute the entire list of moves so people can see the wide variety of ways that questioning, listening and responding can be practiced. Point out to participants that virtually all the moves listed are designed to strengthen connections among group members. Ask participants to recap how they tried to make the moves they were allocated.

Specific Moves

Ask a question or make a comment that shows you are interested in what another person says

Ask a question or make a comment that encourages another person to elaborate on something they have already said

Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions

Use body language to show interest in what different speakers are saying

Make a specific comment indicating how you found another person's ideas interesting/useful.

Contribute something that builds on, or springs from, what someone else has said. Be explicit about the way you are building on the other person's thoughts

Make a comment that at least partly paraphrases a point someone has already made

Make a summary observation that takes into account several people's contributions & that touches on a recurring theme in the discussion

Ask a cause and effect question - for example, "can you explain why you think it's true that if these things are in place such and such a thing will occur?"

When you think it's appropriate, ask the group for a moment's silence to slow the pace of conversation and give you, and others, time to think

Find a way to express appreciation for the enlightenment you have gained from the discussion. Be specific about what it was that helped you understand something better

Disagree with someone in a respectful and constructive way

CONVERSATIONAL ROLES

Problem, Dilemma, or Theme Poser

This participant has the task of introducing the topic of conversation. She draws on her own ideas and experiences as a way of helping others into conversation about the theme.

Reflective Analyst

This member keeps a record of the conversation's development. Every 20 minutes or so, she gives a summary that focuses on shared concerns, issues skirted, and emerging common themes.

Scrounger

The scrounger listens for helpful resources, suggestions, and tips that participants have voiced as they discuss how to work through a problem or situation. She keeps a record of these ideas that is read out before the session ends.

Devil's Advocate

This person listens carefully for any emerging consensus. When she hears this she formulates and expresses a contrary view. This keeps group-think in check and helps participants explore a range of alternative interpretations.

Detective

The detective listens carefully for unacknowledged, unchecked and unchallenged biases that seem to be emerging in the conversation. As she hears these she brings them to the group's attention. She assumes particular responsibility for alerting group members to concerns of race, class and gender. She listens for cultural blindness, gender insensitivity, and comments that ignore variables of power and class.

Theme Spotter

This participant identifies themes that arise during the discussion that are left unexplored and that might form a focus for the next session.

Umpire

This person listens for judgmental comments that sound offensive, insulting and demeaning, and that contradict ground rules for discussion generated by group members.

Textual Focuser

Whenever assertions are made that seem unconnected to the text being discussed, this person asks the speaker to let the group know where in the text the point is made.

Connector

This person does her best to show how participants' contributions are linked or connected to each other. Make a comment that underscores the link between two people's contributions - make this link explicit in your comment

Summarizer

This person has the responsibility to make summary observations that take into account several people's contributions & that touches on a recurring theme in the discussion.

Appreciator

This person makes comment indicating how she found another person's ideas interesting or useful. She is specific as to why this is the case. She does her best to find a way to express appreciation for the enlightenment she has gained from the discussion. She tries to be specific about what it was that helped her understand something better.

Hatful of Quotes

One question that invariably arises regarding exercises such as the circle of voices and circular response, concerns whether or not teachers should require all students to participate. Mandating speech seems like an exercise of teacher power that stands in direct contrast to the spirit of democratic conversation. However, I believe that there are occasions when it is justifiable to exercise power in this way. bell hooks (1994, p. 41) describes how she requires students to read out paragraphs from their journals in class so that none feel invisible or silenced. To her this is a responsible exercise of teacher power. Always allowing students the option to pass in discussion circles means that those who are shy and introverted, or uncomfortable because they perceive themselves as members of a minority race, gender or class, end up not contributing. The longer this pattern of non-participation persists, the harder it is to break. So what seems like an empathic, benign action by the leader - allowing students the right to silence - serves to reinforce existing differences in status and power. Those who are used to holding forth will move automatically to speak, while those whose voices are rarely heard, will be silenced.

One way through this dilemma is to make the mandated act of contributing as stress free as possible. This is the purpose of the 'hatful of quotes' exercise. Prior to a discussion of a text the leader types out sentences or passages from the text onto separate slips of paper. In class she puts these into a hat and asks students to draw one of these slips out of a hat. Students are given a few minutes to think about their quote and then asked to read it out and comment on it. The order of contribution is up to the students. Those who feel more fearful about speaking go last and take more time to think about what they want to say. Because the same five or six quotes are used, students who go later will have heard their quote read out and commented on by those who spoke earlier. So even if they have little to say about their own interpretation of the quote, they can affirm, build on, or contradict a comment a peer has already made on that quote. This exercise is a good way to create a safe opportunity for everyone to speak. Those who are diffident get to say something, thus building confidence for subsequent contributions.

bell hooks Teaching to Transgress. New York: Routledge, 1994

QUOTES TO AFFIRM & CHALLENGE

Here students choose quotes from a text that they wish to affirm or challenge.

Quotes to Affirm

Students form into small groups and each member takes a turn to propose a quote they wish to affirm and the reasons for doing this. The quote does not have to be defended as empirically true. Sometimes a participant will propose a quote because it confirms a point of view she holds. Sometimes she feels the quote states the most important point in the text. At other times the quote is affirmed because it is rhetorically rousing or expressed so lyrically. When everyone in the small group has proposed a quote to affirm the group then chooses one to report back to the larger class.

The choice of which quote to report back to the whole class can be done randomly or through deliberation. Using the random approach the small group members each type out their quote beforehand. At the end of the small group conversation group members hand all the pieces of paper to one person who then randomly selects a quote. This quote is read out to the whole class with everyone (not just the student who originally chose the quote) trying to explain what it was about the quote that was so compelling. In contrast to this random approach, the small group can simply report the quote which drew the greatest support.

Quotes to Challenge

The 'quote to challenge' activity follows the same procedure only this time students choose a quote that they disagree with, find contradictory, believe to be inaccurate, or consider reprehensible and immoral. Each person proposes their quote to the small group and group members choose one to report back to the larger class. One thing that has surprised us in this reporting back phase is the unexpected advantages of randomly choosing a small group quote. Because group members don't know which quote will be drawn out of the hat, they have to stay alert to hearing the merits of, or objections to, all the quotes proposed. When a quote is chosen by consensus in the small group we have noticed that groups often pick one quote early on and then spend their time rehearsing a presentation on all the reasons why it's terrific or appalling. This ensures an impressive small group report, but it also means that the opportunity for fruitful discussion of the merits of diverse, even contradictory, quotes is lost.

Circular Response Discussions

The circular response exercise is a way to democratize discussion participation, to promote continuity and to give people some experience of the effort required in respectful listening. In this process participants sit in a circle so that everyone can see each other, and each person in turn takes up to a minute to talk about an issue or question that the group has agreed to discuss.

Speakers are not free, however, to say anything they want. They must incorporate into their remarks some reference to the preceding speaker's message and then use this as a springboard for their own comments. This doesn't have to be an agreement – it can be an expression of dissent from the previous opinion. The important thing is that the previous person's comments are the prompt for whatever is being said in circular response. What speakers articulate depends on listening well to the preceding speaker as much as on generating new or unspoken ideas. Participants are also asked if at all possible to point out anything the previous speaker said that was particularly interesting, resonating or important. The optimal size for this exercise is 6-8 participants. Here's the instructions:

Choose a theme that the group wishes to discuss, form into a circle and ask for a volunteer to start the discussion. This person speaks up to a minute or so about the theme chosen. After the minute is up, the first discussant yields the floor and the person sitting to the discussant's left speaks for a minute or so. The second discussant must show in her contribution how what she is saying springs from, or is in response to, the comments of the first discussant. After a minute or so, the second discussant stops speaking, and the person to her left becomes the third discussant, and thus the discussion moves all the way around the circle. To sum up:

1. no one may be interrupted while speaking;
2. no one may speak out of turn in the circle;
3. each person is allowed only a minute or so to speak;
4. each person, in all comments, must strive to show how his or her remarks spring from, or respond to, the comments of the previous discussant.
5. each person should try to show appreciation for something the previous speaker raised

After each discussant has had a turn to speak, the floor is opened for general conversation, and the previous ground rules are no longer in force.

SNOWBALLING

One way to illustrate how discussions can be developmental and increasingly inclusive is to use a process called "snowballing" or "pyramiding".

Students begin this activity by responding to questions or issues as individuals. They then create progressively larger dialogic groups by doubling the size of these every few minutes until by the end of the activity everyone is reconvened in the large group. At each stage as students move from pairs to quartets, quartets to octets they recap the chief point of difference, or the chief question that emerged, in their previous round of conversation.

Here's the instructions students follow:

We are going to try something a little different today. It's called "snowballing" and it gives you a chance to think and talk about issues in a variety of different configurations. Please begin with some private, solitary reflection in which you gather your thoughts about the questions at the bottom of this sheet. Jot down some notes if you wish.

After about 1 minute of solitary thought join with one other person to continue the dialogue. After about five minutes you and your partner should join another pair to form a group of four. As the two pairs merge, each pair should recap the chief difference that emerged, or a question they raised, in their conversation.

The quartets will continue the discussion for another 10 minutes and then they will merge with other quartets to create octets - groups of 8. As the two quartets merge, each quartet recaps the chief difference that emerged, or a question they raised, in their conversation.

The discussion proceeds for 20 minutes this time and continues in 20 minute intervals until the whole class is brought together at the end of the session.

This exercise gets a lot of people talking to one another, while retaining much of the value of small groups. It also contributes a festive quality to the class. People mill about excitedly and greet each other warmly as they meet in new configurations. On the other hand, snowballing can sometimes have a frenetic, disjointed feel.

NEWSPRINT DIALOGUES

Small groups summarize their conversations on large sheets of newsprint or chalkboards. Individual members of the class are then free to wander about the room reading all the responses & adding comments.

Here's the instructions:

In this activity, you will be working in small groups most of the time. I have prepared some questions for you to consider in these groups, but don't follow them too slavishly. Use them as a jumping off point for ideas you find especially worth exploring. You will have 30 minutes in your groups to discuss these questions and to write your answers to these on the newsprint provided.

You should appoint someone to be recorder but don't start writing immediately. Take some time to let your responses emerge from the discussion. Covering all the questions is not important, but you should begin to jot some ideas down on the newsprint provided within 15 or 20 minutes of starting.

When the 30 minutes is up, post your newsprint sheets around the classroom and tour the answers recorded by other groups. Look especially for common themes that stand out on the sheets and for possible contradictions that arise within or between groups' responses. If possible, write your responses to others' comments on the same sheet of newsprint containing the point you're addressing. Finally, note any questions that were raised for you during the discussion on the separate sheets of newsprint specially provided for this. We will bring the activity to a close with a short debriefing in the large group.

Attractions of this activity are that it takes people out of groups for a while and lets them act as relatively autonomous free agents. It also reminds people that dialogue can work as a written as well as spoken exchange. On the other hand, it is frequently difficult in the limited space and time allotted for students to explain fully the meaning of the words and phrases on the newsprint. Still, it is an interesting alternative way to keep the conversation going.

ROTATING STATIONS

Another way to avoid the usual format of reporting back through a series of summaries is to locate each small group at a station where they are given 5 or 10 minutes to discuss a provocative issue and record their ideas on newsprint or a chalkboard. When this time is up the groups move to new positions in the classroom where they continue their discussion. But now the comments written on the newsprint or chalkboard by the preceding group at the station add a new voice to the mix. Rotations continue every 10 minutes until each group has been at all of the positions and has had a chance to consider all of the other groups' comments. Here's the instructions:

We're going to do another small group activity, but this time you won't be staying in one place for long. Each of you should join a group of about five participants at one of the stations that have been established around the classroom. Together you will have the responsibility of answering some questions by making comments on the newsprint directly in front of your group. You will have 10 minutes to do this. When the 10 minutes is up move with your group to a new station where you will continue your conversation by responding to the comments left behind by the group that has just vacated that station. Record the main points of your discussion at this station and then, after another 10 minutes, rotate to the next station, where you now have the comments of two other groups to consider.

Again take 10 minutes to respond, and then move when the 10 minutes are up. When every group has occupied each station, leaving remarks behind at all of them, break out of your groups and read all of the newsprint comments. Add questions, comments, or criticisms to these news sheets wherever you are inspired to do so. Remember that each station will include comments from all groups, making orderliness a challenge. Write as small and as legibly as you can, please!

Rotating stations encourages students to examine critically ideas that originate outside their group. The safety and intimacy of small groups is retained, yet the diversity of viewpoints experienced in whole class discussion is incorporated. Momentum and excitement tend to grow as groups rotate from one station to another. People feel they have heard from, and responded to, many voices in the classroom in a way that is less threatening than in large group exchanges. On the debit side, the 10 minute period for each rotation is not particularly conducive to deep discussion.

Speech Policy

It may seem strange to suggest that you launch a discussion by advocating silence, but our experience has been that this puts diffident or introverted students at their ease.

Many students from working class backgrounds, female students, or students from underrepresented ethnic groups will approach discussion sessions with a justifiable sense of distrust. Their perception may be that success in academe is correlated with a glib facility to spring confidently into speech at the earliest possible opportunity. What follows is an example of a declaration to students that expresses the teacher's tolerance of silence and also informs students that participation in class discussion is entirely voluntary and should never be used to curry favor with the instructor:

I know that speaking in discussions is a nerve-racking thing and that your fear of making public fools of yourselves can inhibit you to the point of nonparticipation. I, myself, feel very nervous as a discussion participant and spend a lot of my time carefully rehearsing my contributions so as not to look foolish when I finally speak. So please don't feel that you have to speak in order to gain my approval or to show me that you're a diligent student. It's quite acceptable to say nothing in the session, and there'll be no presumption of failure on your part. I don't equate silence with mental inertia. Obviously, I hope you will want to say something and speak up, but I don't want you to do this just for the sake of appearances. So let's be comfortable with a prolonged period of silence that might, or might not, be broken. When anyone feels like saying something, just speak up.

We believe in the power of this kind of early declaration because we've seen how well it works. Students will often come up to us afterwards and say that by granting them public permission not to say anything we actually emboldened them to speak. By deliberately destroying the link between student speech and teacher approval we reduce the pressure on students to look smart in front of us.

Mutual Invitation

Developed by Eric Law (1993) mutual invitation is a technique designed to promote egalitarian group talk. The facilitator begins a discussion by sharing her views on the topic at hand. She then invites another member of the group to respond to what she has said, or to contribute whatever is on her mind regarding the topic. After that person has spoken she then chooses the next person to speak, and so on until all have had the chance to be involved. If someone does not want to offer a comment she can pass, but she then has the responsibility to choose who will speak next. No-one is allowed to interrupt the chosen speaker. Once everyone has spoken open discussion ensues & the ground rule doesn't apply.

This process is a way of structuring the opportunity for all to speak, and also of giving the participants the power to choose the direction of participation. One advantage is that in classes where students know each others' interests and areas of expertise better than the teacher does, those students are able to make more skillful choices about who should speak next than a teacher would.

If the process is used a second and third time the facilitator does not start off by sharing her view. However, she does start out choosing who will be the first to speak.

E.H.F. Law *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*. St Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993 (pp. 79-88).

CRITICAL CONVERSATION PROTOCOL

PURPOSE OF THE EXERCISE

A critical conversation is a focused conversation in which someone is helped:-

1. To come to an awareness of the assumptions she is operating under – particularly those having to do with power relationships and hegemonic practices & ideas
2. To investigate whether these assumptions are well grounded
3. To look at her practice from different viewpoints
4. To think about the implications of the conversation for the future

ROLES PARTICIPANTS PLAY

In a process of structured critical conversation I suggest that people think of playing one of three possible roles - storyteller, detective or umpire.

The **storyteller** is the person who is willing to make herself the focus of critical conversation by first describing some part of her practice or life experience.

The **detectives** are those in the group who help her come to a more fully informed understanding of the assumptions and actions that frame her practice or experience.

The **umpire** is the group member who has agreed to monitor conversation with a view to pointing out when people are talking to each other in a judgmental way. All participants in the group play all three of these roles at different times. The idea is that the behaviors associated with each role gradually become habitual.

HOW THE EXERCISE WORKS

1. *The Storyteller Tells the Tale (10 MINUTES)*

The conversation opens with the person who is the storyteller describing as concretely and specifically as possible an incident from her practice or life that for some reason is lodged in her memory. This incident may be one that is recalled because it was particularly fulfilling or because it was particularly frustrating. Most probably it is an incident that leaves the teller somewhat puzzled by its layers and complexities. The storyteller describes the incident in her own words and without any questions or

interruptions. Her colleagues, who are in the role of detectives, attend to her remarks very carefully. They are listeners with a purpose.

The detectives are trying to identify the explicit and implicit assumptions about practice that they hear in the storyteller's tale. Some of these will be general assumptions about what good practice looks like, some will be about how a good professional should behave, and some will be about how to behave in the specific situation described. The detectives are listening particularly for assumptions that pertain to how the storyteller conceives of power dynamics, or assumptions that are hegemonic (i.e. that seem admirable & useful to the storyteller but that actually work against her best interests & support an inequitable situation).

The detectives are also asked to imagine themselves inside the heads of the other characters in the story and to try to see the events through their eyes. If possible, the detectives make mental or written notes about plausible alternative interpretations of the story that fit the facts as they hear them, but that would come as a surprise to the storyteller.

2. *The Detectives Ask Questions About the Event (10 MINUTES)*

After the storyteller has finished speaking, the detectives are allowed to break their silence to ask her any questions they have about the events she has just described. The detectives are searching for any information that will help them uncover the assumptions they think the storyteller holds. They are also looking for details not provided in the first telling of the story that will help them re-live the events described through the eyes of the other participants involved, thereby helping them to understand these events from the different participants' perspectives.

One ground rule they must observe is that of requesting information, not giving judgment. Their questions are asked only for the purpose of clarifying the details of what happened. They must refrain from giving their opinions or suggestions, no matter how helpful they feel these might be. Detectives should ask only 1 question at a time. They should **not** give advice on how the storyteller should have acted. Keep laughter to a minimum, you don't know how it's received.

As the storyteller hears the detectives' questions she tries to answer them as fully and honestly as possible. She also has the opportunity to ask the detectives why they asked the particular questions they put to her. The umpire points out to the detectives any examples of judgmental questions that they ask, particularly those in which they imply that they have seen a better way to respond to the situation than the way that's been described. Examples of such questions would be those beginning "Did you really believe that ...?", "Didn't you think to ...?", or "Do you mean to tell us that ...?"

The umpire brings the detectives' attention to the ways in which their tone of voice and body language, as well as their words, risk driving the storyteller into a defensive bunker.

3. *The Detectives' Report the Assumptions they Hear in the Storyteller's Descriptions (10 MINUTES)*

When the incident has been fully described, and all the detectives' questions have been answered, the conversation moves to the assumption hunting phase. Here the detectives tell the storyteller, on the basis of her story and her response to their questions, what assumptions they think she holds.

This is done as non-judgmentally as possible, as a reporting back exercise. The detectives seek only to state clearly what they think the storyteller's assumptions are, not to judge whether they are right or wrong. They are asked to state these assumptions tentatively, descriptively and non-judgmentally, using phrases like "it seems as if ...", "I wonder if one assumption you might be holding is that?", or "Is it possible that you assumed that ...?" They state only one assumption at a time, do **not** give advice, and watch out for laughter.

The umpire intervenes to point out to detectives when she thinks they are reporting assumptions with a judgmental overlay.

4. *The Detectives Give Alternative Interpretations of the Events Described (10 MINUTES)*

The detectives now give alternative versions of the events that have been described, based on their attempts to re-live the story through the eyes of the other participants involved. These alternative interpretations must be plausible in that they are consistent with the facts as they have been described by the storyteller. When appropriate, detectives should point out how power or hegemony plays itself out in the different interpretations they are giving.

The umpire points out those moments when a psychoanalytic second guessing is taking place. This happens when the detectives start to preface their interpretations with remarks like "you know, what you were really doing", or "what was really going on".

The detectives are to give these interpretations as descriptions, not judgments. They are describing how others involved in the events might have viewed them, not saying whether or not these perceptions are accurate. They should not give any advice here.

As the storyteller hears these alternative interpretations she is asked to let the detectives have the floor so that they can state their case as fully as possible. After they have

described how the situation might look through the eyes of other participants, the storyteller is then allowed to give any additional information that would cast doubt on these interpretations. She is also allowed to ask the detectives to elaborate on any confusing aspects of why they are making the interpretations they are. At no time is she expected to agree with the detectives.

5. *Participants Do An Experiential Audit (10 MINUTES)*

Finally, the storyteller and detectives state what they have learned, what insights they have realized, and what their reflection means for their future actions. Now the detectives can give whatever advice they wish.

The umpire gives an overall summary of the ability of participants to be respectful listeners and talkers, and also gives her perspective on the story.

At each iteration of this exercise the roles change. As each new story is told each person assumes a different role so that all play each of the roles at least once.

Although this is a heavily structured an artificial exercise, the intent is for these dispositions to become so internalized that the ground rules and structure outlined above become unnecessary.

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The Classroom Critical Incident Questionnaire

Please take about five minutes to respond to each of the questions below about this week's class(es). Don't put your name on the form - your responses are anonymous. When you have finished writing, put one copy of the form on the table by the door and keep the other copy for yourself. At the start of next week's class I will be sharing the group's responses with all of you. Thanks for taking the time to do this. What you write will help me make the class more responsive to your concerns.

At what moment in class this week did you feel most engaged with what was happening ?

At what moment in class this week did you feel most distanced from what was happening?

What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most affirming or helpful ?

What action that anyone (teacher or student) took in class this week did you find most puzzling or confusing ?

What about the class this week surprised you the most ? (This could be something about your own reactions to what went on, or something that someone did, or anything else that occurs to you).

LEARNING AUDIT

WHAT DO YOU KNOW NOW
THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW THIS
TIME LAST WEEK ?

WHAT CAN YOU DO NOW THAT
YOU COULDN'T DO THIS TIME
LAST WEEK ?

WHAT CAN YOU TEACH SOMEONE
ELSE TO KNOW OR DO NOW
THAT YOU COULDN'T TEACH
THEM THIS TIME LAST WEEK ?

Questioning to Keep Discussion Going

One of the best ways to enliven and deepen dialogue is through the skillful use of questioning. Discussion leaders who seem to have a knack for keeping discussion going tend to emphasize their role as questioner and inquirer. They frequently ask questions to get more information from participants, to uncover the sources of participant opinions, and to get clarification on those opinions. They also raise questions to underscore the links between comments and to synthesize or sum up an entire conversation. Questioning is also a practice that embodies respect. It demonstrates that we care enough about others' thoughts to learn more about them through the questions we pose. Furthermore, one of the indicators of a good discussion is the extent to which participants themselves learn to practice the art of questioning and come to see that one powerful way to add to a conversation is by asking questions of others.

Below are several types of questions particularly helpful in maintaining discussion momentum, with a number of examples under each type:

Questions that ask for more evidence

How do you know that?

What data is that claim based on?

What does the author say that supports your argument?

Where did you find that view expressed in the text?

What evidence would you give to someone who doubted your interpretation?

Questions that ask for clarification

Can you put that another way?

What's a good example of what you are talking about?

What do you mean by that?

Can you explain the term you just used?

Can you give a different illustration of your point?

Linking or Extension Questions

Is there a connection between what you just said and what was said a moment ago?

How does your comment fit in with Neng's earlier observation?

How does your observation relate to what the group decided last week?

Does your idea challenge or support what we seem to be saying?

How does that contribution add to what has already been said?

Summary and Synthesis Questions

What are one or two particularly important ideas that emerged from this discussion?

What remains unresolved or contentious about this topic?

What do you understand better as a result of today's discussion?

Based on our discussion today, what do we need to talk about next time if we're to understand this issue better?

What key word or concept best captures the gist of our discussion today?

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO ENGAGE ME (AS A SKEPTICAL, RESISTANT, HOSTILE LEARNER) IN DISCUSSION ?

I would be more likely to participate if ...

Former resisters testified to its utility

Faculty modeled their own participation

I had the right to silence & silent participation

I knew it was genuinely open & I wasn't being asked to guess the 'correct' interpretation & risk humiliation

The group had developed norms & agreed to respect these

I knew that participation counted towards my grade & that a range of indicators had been specified

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CRITICAL DEBATE INSTRUCTIONS

Find a contentious issue on which opinion is divided amongst participants. Frame the issue as a debate motion.

Propose the motion to participants. By a show of hands ask people either to volunteer to work on a team that is preparing arguments to support the motion or to volunteer to work on a team that is preparing arguments to oppose the motion.

Announce that all those who have prepared to work on the team to draft arguments to support the motion will now comprise the team to draft arguments to oppose the motion. Similarly, all those who have prepared to work on the team to draft arguments to oppose the motion will now comprise the team to draft arguments to support the motion.

Conduct the debate. Each team chooses one person to present their arguments. After initial presentations the teams reconvene to draft rebuttal arguments and choose one person to present these.

Debrief the debate. Discuss with participants their experience of this exercise. Focus on how it felt to argue against positions you were committed to. What new ways of thinking about the issue were opened up? Did participants come to new understandings? Did they change their positions on this issue at all?

Ask participants to write a follow up reflection paper on the debate. Here's the instructions ...

1. What assumptions about the issue that you hold were clarified / confirmed for you by the debate?
2. Which of your assumptions surprised you during the debate ? In other words, were you made aware of assumptions you hold that you didn't know you had ?
3. How could you check out these new assumptions ? What sources of evidence would you consult ?
4. What new perspectives on the issue suggested themselves to you ?
5. In what ways, if any, were your existing assumptions challenged or changed by the debate ?

DISCUSSION INVENTORY

One approach we have found useful is to tell students at the start of a particular class that you will be saving five to ten minutes towards the end of that day's discussion period to give some of your own reflections on the discussion. We view this as keeping a 'Discussion Inventory' that will be unpacked just before students leave. The inventory is essentially a list of the things we want to make sure students are exposed to before they exit the room that day. It is blank at the start of the discussion but fills up as we jot down errors we hear, perspectives that we feel are glossed over or ignored, and important oppositional views that we think are too easily rushed past. A good time to unpack this inventory is immediately prior to inviting anyone in the group to have the last word that day (itself an idea we picked up from Ira Shor (1996)).

In the five-minute inventory time we provide information about perspectives that were missed during the discussion and we offer alternative interpretations that students did not wish to consider. This is also an excellent time for us to draw students' attention to what we consider to be major errors of understanding we have noticed being expressed during the conversation. Sometimes in the middle of a discussion that is going well someone makes a statement that we know shows a complete misunderstanding of a concept, or is clearly factually wrong, but we feel uncomfortable interrupting the flow of talk at that particular time and singling that contributor out as somehow lacking. When that erroneous statement is made we jot down a note on our inventory pad to make sure we address it in the time we've reserved for ourselves towards the end of the class that day. So the discussion inventory allows us to correct mistakes and to tackle repressive tolerance by making sure participants do not leave the room without being exposed to a perspective we feel it is necessary for them to encounter.

STUDENT SELF-EVALUATION OF DISCUSSION PARTICIPATION

WHAT IDEAS, QUESTIONS OR INFORMATION DID I CONTRIBUTE TO THE DISCUSSION TODAY?

HOW DID I TRY TO ENCOURAGE ANOTHER STUDENT TO SPEAK TODAY?

WHAT DID I LEARN FROM THE DISCUSSION TODAY?

(New information, a new understanding of something already covered, an idea to follow up after the discussion etc.)

HOW DID I MAKE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN WHAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE WERE SAYING TODAY?

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